

## Moderate Student Construction: A Study on Moderate Islamic Views and Practices Among Intellectuals in Islamic Higher Education in West Papua

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### **Abstract**

*Various efforts have been made by the leadership of Islamic Higher Education institutions to prevent the infiltration of radical ideologies on their campuses. These efforts range from internalizing religious moderation to monitoring deviant student organizations, both of which have been intensively pursued by institutional leaders. However, since the declaration of these initiatives, there has been no empirical evaluation to assess whether students in Islamic Higher Education, particularly in Papua and West Papua, have a proper understanding of the concept of moderate Islam. This gap could hinder policymakers' ability to effectively combat the spread of radical ideas. This study employs a mixed-method approach, surveying 1,309 students from three Islamic Higher Education institutions in West Papua: LAIN Sorong, STIT Yapis Manokwari, and STAI Al Mahdi Fakfak. The quantitative component consists of surveys designed to evaluate key indicators of religious moderation, including tolerance, anti-violence attitudes, and national commitment—critical factors that influence pro-violent extremism views in Islamic Higher Education. Additionally, qualitative studies were conducted through focus group discussions with selected key informants to gain deeper insight into the students' understanding, actions, and efforts to build moderation capacity. The study's findings revealed that, although students' knowledge of religious moderation is relatively high, the factors of tolerance and anti-violence attitudes are strong predictors of pro-violent extremism. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen the role of "moderation houses" from an institutional perspective, and integrated programs must serve as the foundation for building religious moderation capacity, particularly for students in Islamic Higher Education.*

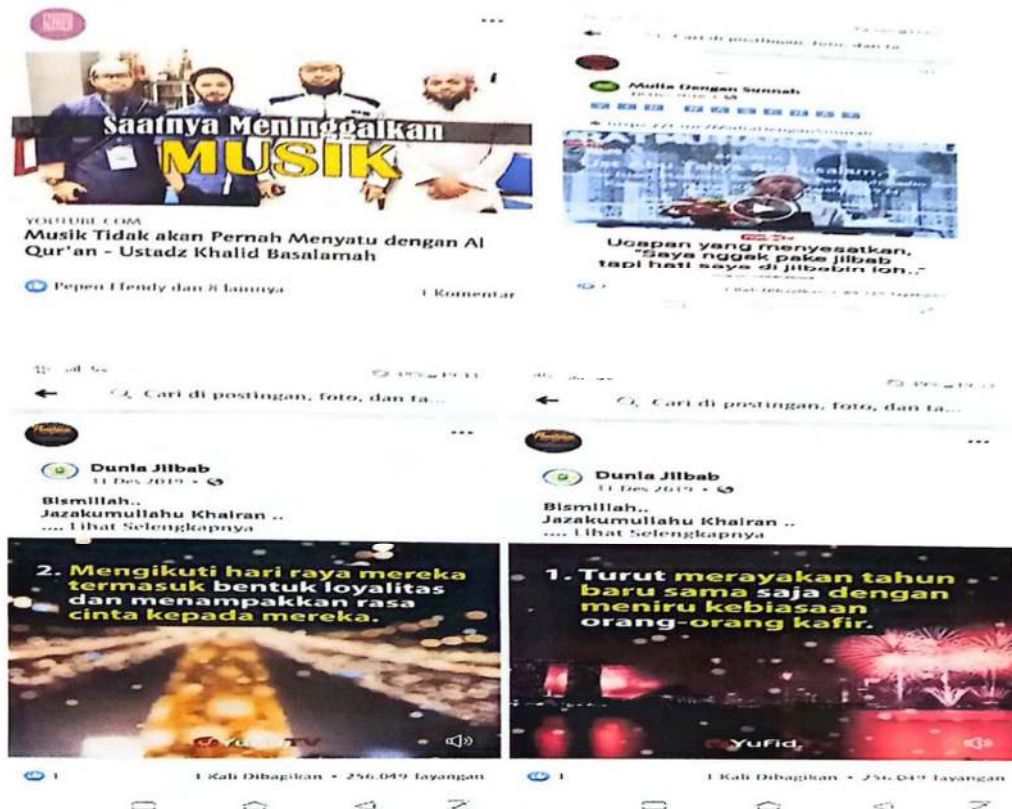
**Keywords:** *religious moderation, moderation capacity, religious moderation indicators, moderate students, Islamic higher education*

## INTRODUCTION

Given the COVID-19 issue, which has continued to increase since the beginning of March 2020, radicalism also exists in the face of existing outbreaks and disasters. West Papua has the highest religious tolerance indeks (Ri, 2019; Utami, 2024), but radicalism has appeared massively in Islamic Higher Education. Especially in the Papua region, the development of radicalism is quite massive. The results of a study conducted by the Center for Research and Development of Religious Guidance and Religious Services of the Ministry of Religion showed that tolerance, which is a parameter of religious moderation in West Papua, is the highest in Indonesia, with an index score of 82.1 out of a maximum value of 100, which means it is very high (Savitri, 2019). However, the leadership continues to make efforts to protect the issue of radicalism on campus. As stated by the Rector of IAIN Papua, the campus should not be used as a place for discussion by groups from outside that bring radical teachings contrary to the state ideology. In addition, the Rectors of IAIN also agreed that any youth organizations and community organizations that infiltrate the campus spread and instill radical teachings, which can bury the seeds of hatred (Antara, 2019). This is proof of the difficulty of stemming intolerance in Islamic Higher Education. The validity of the existing data and research has not been included in practical studies targeting intellectual millennials in Islamic Higher Education.

The millennial generation, which continues to exist using social media, is a strategic entrance in the spread of radicalism (Luqyana & Sukmono, 2020). Understanding the concept of moderation in Islamic Higher Education must be a serious concern for intellectual millennials. They actively use online channels to express their Islam (Triantoro, 2020; Zuhri, 2021). Starting from the use of veils to the expression level on social media.

Figure 1. Screenshot of social media of Islamic Higher Education students in West Papua



Source: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) (2022)

Figure 1 above is one small proof that students at Islamic Higher Education in the Papua and West Papua regions have yet to internalize moderate Islam. According to the Secretary General of the Ministry of Religion, a person with a moderate view has at least five indicators that can be seen, namely the responsibility of his stance, openness of his view, deliberation, humility, and thinking of the benefits (Islam, 2019). These five conceptions must be internalized in religious life in Islamic Higher Education. The concept of religious moderation houses should be implemented in Islamic Higher Education, but there are still many students who do not understand it (Hefni & Ahmadi, 2022). By the circular of the Minister of Religion Number B3663.1/DJ.I/BA.02/10/2019 concerning religious moderation houses. This circular is undoubtedly the basis of Islamic Higher Education leadership's policy in institutional moderation according to the concept of moderate Islam. However, the realization still needs to be improved. The question is, has the existing moderation house not been implemented massively, or have these intellectual millennials (students) yet to understand the concept of moderation? Fascinating to do a study.

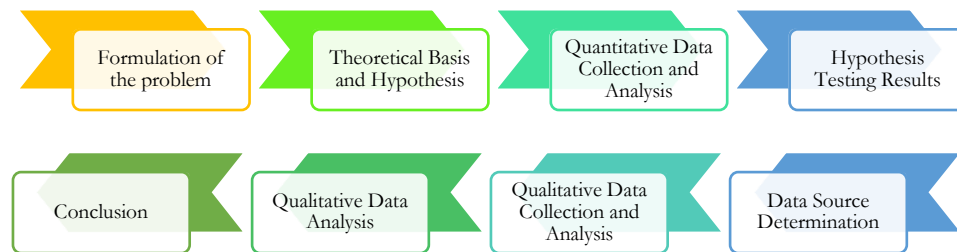
Studies have shown that religious moderation is essential in maintaining harmony and tolerance of spiritual life. At least three patterns of tendency over some moderate Islamic studies have been conducted. Existing studies criticize young people's spiritual understanding of moderation conception (AR, 2020; Munir & Herianto, 2020; Salamah et al., 2020) then the religious expressions shown by the young people (Abror, 2020; Faisal, 2020; Gufron, 2019; Syatar et al., 2020) and models of the moderate Islamic religious movement carried out (Aziz, 2020; Basyir, 2020; Faiq, 2021; Kumalasari, 2022; Parhan et al., 2022). Existing studies on religious moderation are conducted on three basic scopes: understanding, expression, and implementation of religious moderation in various regions. However, it generally produces conceptual and limited findings for institutional programs. In addition, the research approach is still restricted to statistical calculations and uses more literature studies.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the research area, it is still focused on areas with a solid Islamic base (Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi). However, studies have also been found in minority areas in Manado, North Sulawesi, but still at the level of implementation of related government policies. West Papua, as a base for religious tolerance with a variety of Muslim minorities, there has been no related study, especially for young intellectuals in various existing Islamic Higher Education. Therefore, the offer of a methodology with a survey approach can complement the existing research. This approach will map the potential empirically so relevant parties can use it to determine further policies.

The previous research analyzed was still confined to the conceptual level. Not to see a comprehensive picture based on empirical data. Here, the researcher will focus on mapping knowledge, expression, and implementation of religious moderation in Islamic Higher Education in Papua and West Papua. This study is based on the argument that religious moderation in the campus world still needs to be at a practical and practical level. In addition, it is essential to make models of religious moderation policies related to grounding moderate Islam so that students, as agents of change, also contribute to sowing harmony and tolerance. Therefore, research studies based on surveys become feasible and should be done immediately. This search of field conditions is a measure of mapping factual conditions about the understanding, expression, and implementation actions of intellectual millennials in Islamic Higher Education. In the end, the outcome of this research contributes to providing evidence-based information from various parties. This study aims to uncover the phenomena that have been created in 3 (three) research questions, namely: 1) mapping the attitudes and behaviors of intellectual millennials toward moderate Islam, 2) mapping the implementation of moderate Islam for intellectual millennials, and 3) capacity building in increasing religious moderation.

This study uses a combination method of the sequential explanatory model, which combines quantitative and qualitative methods in sequential research (Creswell & Zhang, 2009). This model is carried out in the first stage using quantitative and qualitative methods used in the second stage. The quantitative method in this study plays a role in obtaining associative data, and the qualitative method proves and deepens the quantitative data received at the initial stage (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The research steps of this sequential explanatory model can be seen in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2. Sequential Explanatory Design research steps



Source: Designing and conducting mixed methods research (Creswell & Clark, 2017)

The research was conducted on 3 (three) Islamic Higher Education in the West Papua region (IAIN Sorong, STIT Yapis Manokwari, and STAI Al-Mahdi Fakfak) with a total population of 1,309 students. The number of samples was 306 using the Slovin formula with a 5% error rate. The samples obtained were then distributed proportionally with the purposive random sampling technique. These 306 samples include students active in student organizations (key actors). Student actor keys are taken from at least two people at each sample member university.

Furthermore, data was obtained by distributing a Likert scale survey form. Before being disseminated, the existing questionnaire was validated on students who were not the object of research. Furthermore, the questionnaire was distributed to the sample member students set up so that the right and fastest people could fill it out. The survey will be stopped when all samples of each Islamic Higher Education are filled out and fulfilled.

The collected data were then tabulated and analyzed quantitatively using multilevel regression. This analysis is intended to determine the basic information of the sample, which is the target of the research intervention. The results of multilevel regression are interpreted by looking at the value of the regression coefficient ( $r$ -calculus) and comparing it with the value of the  $r$ -table. The  $r$ -table value for 306 samples at 5% significance is 0.113. If the  $r$ -count value  $> 0.113$ , then the conjecture/prediction proposed is significant, and vice versa (Bryman & Cramer, 2004). The survey results that were analyzed quantitatively were then confirmed qualitatively with key informants through focus group discussions. Key informants selected as participants in the focus group discussions were the heads of student organizations, lecturers who teach citizenship and Islamic studies courses, and campus officials (vice-rectors and heads of the Center for Moderation Studies). Focus group discussions were conducted to explore information related to understanding, acceptance, and practice of religious moderation in Islamic Higher Education.

## DISCUSSION

### Religious Moderation Indicators Based on Expert Views

Religious moderation is a way of practicing a moderate, not extreme, religion and tends to respect differences (Ramadhan, 2022). In practice, a moderate person has at least four indicators: tolerance, anti-violence, commitment to nationality, and accommodating local culture (Islamy, 2022; Prakosa, 2022). These four indicators identify how a person practices religious solid moderation, especially in Indonesia. First, tolerance is an attitude that gives full access to others to express their beliefs even though they differ from what we believe. An attitude of mutual respect and appreciation for strengths and weaknesses is the essence of this tolerance. Second, anti-violence is an attitude of opposing or rejecting a belief/teaching, or ideology that uses extreme methods in the name of religion. Third, national commitment is a person's perspective, attitude, and religious actions that impact their loyalty to the sovereignty and existence of the nation and state. Fourth, accommodating to culture means an attitude of being willing to accept religious practices that accommodate culture and tradition. Every moderate person tends to accept religious practices and actions as long as they do not conflict with the basic principles of religion (Basyir, 2020).

As intellectual millennials, students must be able to internalize indicators of religious moderation in every attitude and action because campuses that are "laboratories" of religious moderation must continue to internalize and create a moderate student order massively and consistently (Marfu'ah & Nawawi, 2022; Wulandari & Sari, 2023). It is necessary to see how students respond to their attitudes and actions regarding religious moderation. The campus's success as an institution that can facilitate the practice of moderation needs to be evaluated comprehensively (Hefni & Ahmadi, 2022). Therefore, a survey of understanding and moderate Islamic actions of intellectuals in religious higher education becomes important amid the intolerance in higher education. If the map of attitudes, behavior tendencies, and implementation of moderation can be mapped, then higher education can respond to increase student capacity building in increasing religious moderation.

This study uses three theories as analysis tools. Bloom's theory of understanding examines students' understanding of moderation. Second, the theory of religious expression is based on the typology of Nurcholis Madjid. This theory is used as a knife for analyzing students' religious expressions in actualising the conception of moderation as they understand it. Finally, Max Weber's theory of Action. This theory is used to see the actions taken by students in expressing their religion. Bloom defines understanding as the ability to absorb the meaning of what is learned and taught to it (Forehand, 2010). Four parameters are used to see the degree of material absorption or comprehension. First is the ability to translate, interpreted as an abstract conception, into symbolic practice so that it is easy to learn. Second, the Ability to Interpret is knowing and understanding something. In addition, this interpretation can also be interpreted as the connection between the knowledge possessed and other knowledge to be obtained. Third is the ability to explore; this requires more understanding and the ability to examine what is written (Kuswana, 2012).

Furthermore, Salomon explained that a person's expression of something can be explained and predicted by looking at the relationship between cognition beliefs, Affection, and Behavioral conative. Cognition is knowledge obtained through direct experience with objects, attitudes, objects, and related information from various sources. This component is often referred to as a belief or belief in something. According to psychological science, cognition consists of sensing and observation, response, reproduction and association, memory, fantasy, thinking, intelligence, and intuition. Affection is an emotion or feeling towards a sure thing. Emotions and feelings especially have an evaluative nature, namely whether a person likes or dislikes something. Conation is a person's tendency to carry out an

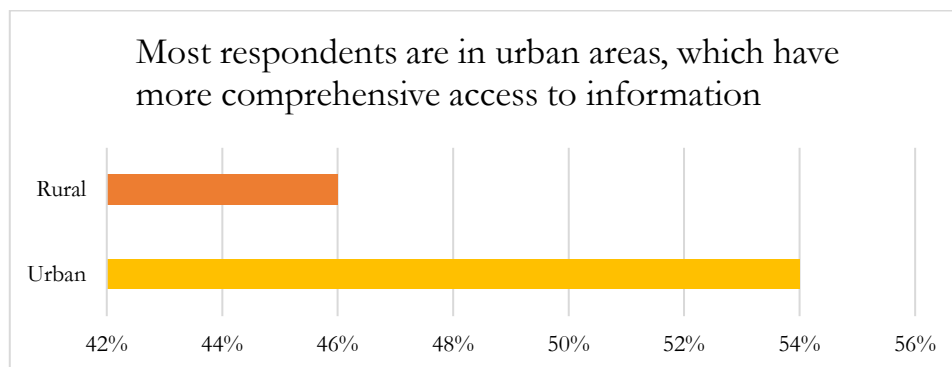
action and behaviour in a certain way towards an object. In various studies, *konasi* is usually an expression of a person's intention to use something.

Finally, Max Weber stated that the actions taken by each individual or group are oriented to the motives and objectives of the perpetrators. Understanding each individual or group is the same as appreciating them. Thus, we can understand why the community members act (Jones, 2003). According to Weber, there are four types of actions. The first is traditional actions, which arise from habits and cultures passed down from generation to generation. Second, effective action. It is an action that occurs based on the conditions and orientation of the individual or group. Third, instrumental rational actions are actions in which each individual or group seeks to achieve goals that have been set and measured. Finally, values rationality's actions are based on reasons and goals associated with values that have potential achievements (Turner, 2012).

### Demographic Description of Respondents

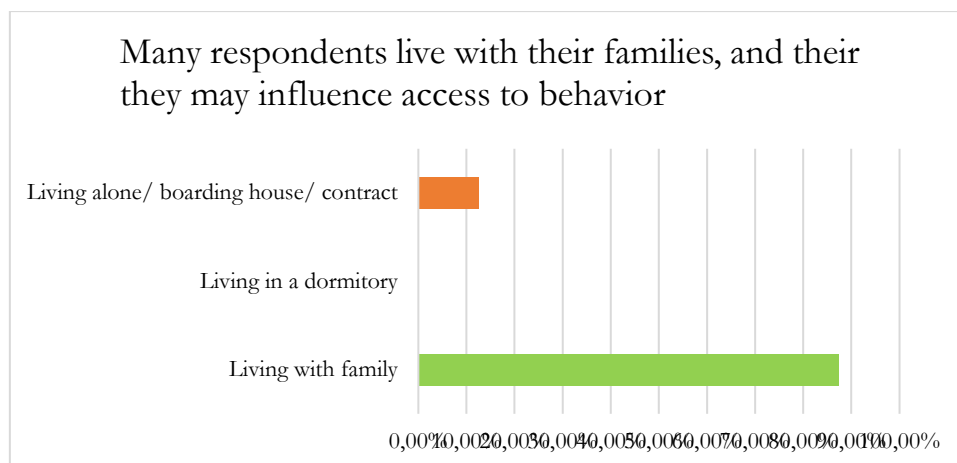
Based on the results of the calculation of respondents in this study, they are classified into three characteristics with the overall frequency of respondent characteristics: area of residence, place of residence, gender, and involvement in the organization. The characteristics of respondents based on place of residence are shown in Figures 3 and 4 below:

Figure 3. Respondents' Place of Residence (based on region)



Source: Data processed with Microsoft Excel for Windows (2022)

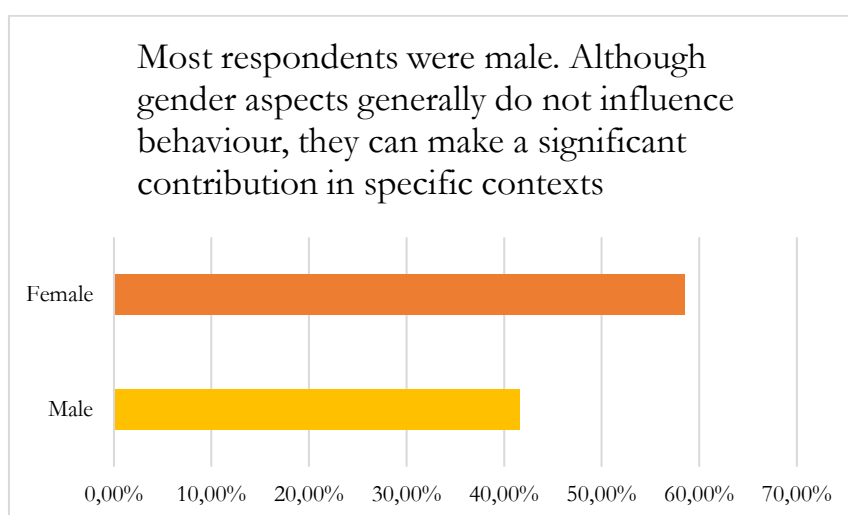
Figure 4. Respondents' Place of Residence (based on residence status)



Source: Data processed with Microsoft Excel for Windows (2022)

Based on their residence, respondents in urban areas are slightly more than those in rural areas (or by other names). This indicates that respondents generally live in urban areas that have easier access to the internet and access to information. Technically, the link to the survey questionnaire was distributed via WhatsApp social media. Those with internet access are more likely to be involved in this survey. However, the increasingly widespread internet penetration into rural areas means that this survey can reach far into remote villages in West Papua province, so there is only an 8% difference between the two domicile groups. In addition, 87.50% of respondents live with their parents, and 12.5% live alone (boarding houses). It is interesting to explore that moderate Islamic understanding is more or less influenced by the residential environment. Furthermore, Figure 4 shows the characteristics of respondents based on gender.

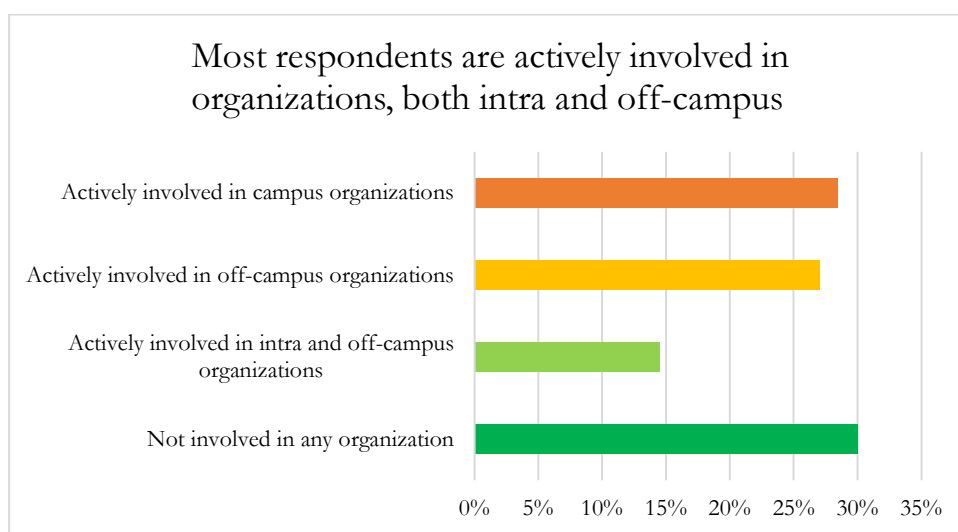
Figure 4. Respondent gender type



Source: Data processed with Microsoft Excel for Windows (2022)

There are more male respondents than female respondents. The accidental determination of respondents causes undeniable differences in numbers based on gender. However, the number of male respondents (41.55%) and female respondents (58.45%) is still reasonable. Moreover, in the context of this study, gender differences were initially considered not to have a significant effect. However, exploring the cross-analysis process in the specific context of gender-based respondents may be interesting. Furthermore, the characteristics of respondents based on organizational involvement are shown in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5. Respondents' Organisational Involvement



Source: Data processed with Microsoft Excel for Windows (2022)

Regarding respondents' involvement in organizations, it was found that 70% of students were active in intra and off-campus organizations. This shows that most respondents are community groups active in various social activities or social activists. The categorization of organizational involvement is interesting to be used as a measure. In the context of religious moderation, there is a discourse that students exposed to radicalism are the only groups that actively participate in organizational activities. At the same time, those who are not active in organizations tend to be moderate. Even globally, this phenomenon has been justified by data.

### **The tendency of intellectual millennials' attitudes and behaviors toward moderate Islam**

The tendency of students to have moderate attitudes and behaviors is seen in the Pro Opinion of Violent Extremism (Nivette et al., 2017). The results of quantitative analysis through multilevel regression showed that almost all factors of religious moderation variables predicted a Pro Opinion of Violent Extremism. However, the direction of the prediction sometimes matched the initial estimate. The results of multilevel regression analysis can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Multilevel regression analysis

Variable	Sub Variable	Correlation Coefficient of Pro-Violent Extremism Opinion	Hypothesis Acceptance
Tolerance	External empathy	0,450***	accepted
	Internal empathy: Empathy	0,386***	accepted
	Internal empathy: Rejection	0,175***	accepted
	Social dominance orientation	0,189***	accepted
Anti-Violence	Anti-violence	0,208***	accepted
Accommodating local culture	Accommodating culture	0,196***	accepted
National Commitment	Practical Politics	0,150***	accepted
	Activism	0,187***	accepted
	Good citizens	0,111	rejected
	Belief in development	0,184***	rejected
	Constitution	0,016	rejected
	Regional Elections	0,072	rejected
	National elections	0,060	rejected

Description: The number indicates a standardized regression coefficient (the more significant the coefficient value, the greater the strength of the variable in predicting Pro-Violent Extremism Opinion), and the symbol (\*\*\*) indicates a statistically significant relationship.

Source: Data processed with IBM SPSS.21.0 (2022)

From these findings, several conclusions can be drawn: First, almost all religious moderation variables predict Pro-Violent Extremism Opinions significantly. The results of this study confirm that the variables in religious moderation in their operations can predict the extreme views of millennial students in fighting for their religion (Mulyana, 2023). Second, the tolerance variable with the empathy sub-variable is the most significant aspect of religious moderation that can be used as an intervention target among students in Islamic Higher Education.

### Implementation of moderate Islam for intellectual millennials

Religious tolerance is the most discussed issue in implementing focus group discussions and becomes the center of discussion. This indicates that tolerance is a very comprehensive issue about religious moderation. In addition, tolerance is mentioned in many kinds of literature, and it has become an interesting discussion between religious adherents or teams within one religious adherent in Indonesia (Moh. Muslih et al., 2023). In addition to the issue of tolerance, the topic of discussion also led to the issue of national commitment. This national commitment is manifested in the agreement on the constitution and the basis of the state (Pancasila), which is philosophically built on Islamic and divine values. Interestingly, the issue of anti-violence is a topic that is less popular in the discussion. Anti-violence here means that they are not in an extreme position, not pro-right or pro-left, do not force a particular teaching or religious belief, and are also excessive in worship (Chandra, 2018; Long & Long, 2021)

Furthermore, lecturers and officials at three Islamic higher education institutions mostly accepted the concept and indicators used in the study. However, they still questioned and expected religious moderation to have clear operational standards. Therefore, they provided views and input to add the measured religious moderation variables with twelve

moderation values, including *tawasuth*, *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, *I'tidal*, *syura*, *musawab*, *ishlah*, and others (Fahri & Zainuri, 2019; M. Al Qautsar Pratama, 2023)

Religious insight, academic background, relationships, and individual participation in student organizations can influence a person's religious moderation. Therefore, Islamic Higher Education must carry out appropriate regulations to fortify students to remain moderate. This is because religious moderation is the breath and soul of Islamic Higher Education. IAIN Sorong, STIT Yapis Manokwari, and STIT Almahdi Fakfak refer to the concept and approach of dialogue and deliberation in implementing their religious moderation. This is because of the culture of Papuan society, which always prioritizes efforts for dialogue and deliberation (Ahmad Rizal et al., 2022; Mahmudah et al., 2023).

As a term, religious moderation has become the breath and soul of every activity and program at the three Islamic Higher Education in West Papua. This is seen in various seminar activities, student activities, and campus introductions that always use the core theme of religious moderation. However, the operationalization of religious moderation at the three colleges needs to be clarified. Despite having a high commitment to moderation, the operational procedures, policies, and mechanisms still need to be visible as a mutually reinforcing combination. In addition, even though they have a forum and center for moderation studies, the three colleges are still individual in implementing moderation. This means the religious moderation movement is still personal or separate and has not been operationally controlled institutionally (Suharto et al., 2023). In addition, some lecturers still need help understanding the concept of religious moderation. Even at IAIN Sorong, the change in form from STAIN to IAIN provides an opportunity for external lecturers to join the institution as a trigger for this. Therefore, all respondents agreed that a center or house of moderation is needed to build the academic community's capacity regarding moderate religious understanding.

### **Religious Moderation House in Capacity Building for Religious Moderation**

The survey results show unstable empathy values in almost all groups, including students, lecturers, and education staff at the three Islamic Higher Education in West Papua, indicating vulnerability in the tolerance indicator. This is a bad precedent for Islamic religious colleges, which have been the leading sector of religious moderation. This unstable empathy value allows extremism to emerge and impacts injustice and threat to someone (Trip et al., 2019; van den Bos, 2020). Moreover, in extreme vulnerability, this empathetic instability can turn into antipathy towards a person or group that threatens one's identity (Batson & Ahmad, 2009). Therefore, it is necessary to have a clear and measurable internalization of religious moderation's values in education and teaching, research, and community service. In addition, in education, for example, the values of moderation can be included in the learning curriculum system. With that, empathy and openness can be realised in higher education.

Furthermore, Islamic higher education must open itself up to accept outsiders, not vice versa. Seminars, workshops, and student activities need to be initiated to involve various parties with different backgrounds. This is important as an effort to realize empathy and religious moderation in the academic community. Regarding institutional governance, the institution's and its leader's vision and mission must integrate religious moderation into their operations. The operational achievement of religious moderation in the vision and mission continues to be monitored and evaluated to see its achievement. Establishing a religious moderation house and its concrete regulations is essential to accelerate a study center in a charting student capacity. In addition, the moderation house can also function as a laboratory for sowing religious moderation in society.

Furthermore, three states of Islamic Higher Education in West Papua agreed and committed to implementing the circular letter of the Directorate General of Islamic Education Number B-3663.I/Dj.I/BA.02/10/2019 concerning establishing the House of Religious Moderation. However, the three Islamic higher education institutions still do not have a clear concept of implementation and mechanism. Although IAIN Sorong already has a Center for Religious Moderation, chaired by a pastor (Reverend Obed Nego Mauri, M.Th.), its implementation still does not have a clear direction and mechanism. This happens because the House of Religious Moderation institution appears outside the organization and work procedures. The House of Moderation's establishment is limited to the Chancellor's policy and can be changed and revoked. In addition, as a non-structural institution, the House of Moderation does not have the right to a budget that is managed independently (Sumardi, 2023). This certainly significantly impacts the continuity of religious moderation activities in higher education. Because the implementation of tasks and functions is only optional and not fixed. Therefore, the continuity of the religious moderation house is like "comatose". In other words, with a solid organizational commitment to the institutional structure, the non-structural institution of the religious moderation house will gradually retain its existence. (Musyafak et al., 2021). Religious moderation houses are essential in building the capacity of moderate students.

Religious Moderation Houses in all three Islamic Higher Education were simultaneously ratified and formed after the circular was issued. However, regarding effectiveness, this Religious Moderation House needs to be optimized. Both policy support, moderate budgets, and human resources are essential to expedite. In addition, the young age of Religious Moderation Houses formation, the unclear institutional foundation, and the spirit of wasathiyah that was eliminated along with the spread of Islamic Higher Education enthusiasts in West Papua who are not connected to wasathiyah Islamic organizations are challenges for the House of Religious Moderation. It may lose its moderation node if not anticipated and managed quickly and systematically. In addition, even though the value of Islamic Higher Education visions and missions has been perceived to contain the value of moderation, clarity is still needed to operationalize the visions and missions of Islamic Higher Education. The absence of a monitoring and evaluation system for Religious Moderation Houses also hampers the implementation process of including the value of religious moderation in Islamic Higher Education.

## CONCLUSION

Religious Moderation has conceptually been accepted and recognized as an urgent need for the academic community at the three Islamic Higher Education in West Papua. However, practically and operationally, it cannot be implemented well as an action. The level of vulnerability of the empathy element as an indicator of religious Moderation still needs continuous improvement. The level of vulnerability in the empathy indicator predicts fluctuating tolerance values for students and academics. This means that the potential for symptoms of extremism can still grow and develop in the scope of Islamic higher education, which should be followed up with structured, massive, and sustainable efforts. The results of previous studies were reconfirmed through this study. The symptoms of extremism are still clearly visible and quite enormous. Therefore, a better and more structured reconstruction of religious Moderation is needed in higher education. One of the most relevant efforts in capacity development for the academic community is to optimize the role and function of the Religious Moderation House massively, structured, and professionally.

Although in terms of understanding, it has shown the right direction in religious moderation, in terms of action, it is still quite far from that moderation. Therefore, this study provides practical implications that can be used as a reference in realising moderate students: 1) Regulations on the Institutional Structure of the Religious Moderation House, which are standard if possible, become an integrated part of the Organization and Work Procedures of Higher Education; if not possible, considering the agenda of simplifying the bureaucracy, perhaps special regulations can be made for advocating a structure where religious moderation programs and derivatives are institutionalised into one particular course and or certified training activities as a competency requirement in the Diploma Accompanying Certificate; 2) Integrating religious moderation values in every learning activity, research, and training arranged in a curriculum structure or module as a reference in working; and 3) Training religious moderation agents from elements of students, lecturers, leaders and education personnel who are controlled by the active role of the religious moderation house massively and continuously.

Although this study successfully shows that the understanding and actions of moderation vary among students, and there are still visible symptoms of violent extremism in Islamic religious colleges, there are still some limitations in this study that can be considered for future improvements. One is the geographical approach to the region; this study only focuses on surveying students in the West Papua region, a Muslim minority area. Therefore, the results of this study depend on the geographical characteristics of the study population and may provide similar or different results for other study populations, especially in areas with a solid Islamic base.

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